

Message

From: Stepp, Cathy [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=BEFDAFC0FA1A425EAE232F60AD9BDA1D-STEPP, CATH]
Sent: 12/24/2017 8:41:13 PM
To: Kelley, Jeff [kelley.jeff@epa.gov]
Subject: Re: EPA Cathy Stepp newsclips

Received. It was very well done. Could u share my appreciation to all who worked on this please? Thanks!

Sent from my iPhone

On Dec 21, 2017, at 2:47 PM, Kelley, Jeff <kelley.jeff@epa.gov> wrote:

Cathy, we just FedExed you a binder full of briefing materials to help introduce you to Region 5. Please let me know if there's anything else I can do to help. Otherwise, I'll see you in January!

Jeff Kelley
 Director, Office of External Communications
 U.S. EPA Region 5
 ph: 312-353-1159

From: Stepp, Cathy
Sent: Wednesday, December 20, 2017 9:45 AM
To: Kelley, Jeff <kelley.jeff@epa.gov>
Subject: Re: EPA Cathy Stepp newsclips

Thanks Jeff! Although I found during my time in WI that it's better for my mental health not to read them!

I appreciate the challenging job you have in communicating the benefits of the good work we do at EPA amidst so much noise. I'm excited to work with you as we highlight the critical work we do to protect human health and the environment!

See u soon!

Cathy

Sent from my iPhone

On Dec 20, 2017, at 8:26 AM, Kelley, Jeff <kelley.jeff@epa.gov> wrote:

Cathy, below are news clips about your appointment that my office gathered this morning. I can also add you to the distribution for the other clips packages we prepare (Flint, East Chicago, Wolverine and general Region 5) ... or I can wait until you start your new job.

Also, let me know if there's anything I can do to help as you get ready to join the Region. Otherwise, I look forward to meeting you in person next month.

Jeff Kelley
 Director, Office of External Communications
 U.S. EPA Region 5

ph: 312-353-1159

From: Arcaute, Francisco
Sent: Wednesday, December 20, 2017 8:19 AM
To: Kelley, Jeff <kelly.jeff@epa.gov>; Rowan, Anne <rowan.anne@epa.gov>;
 Grantham, Nancy <Grantham.Nancy@epa.gov>; Bowman, Liz <Bowman.Liz@epa.gov>
Subject: EPA Cathy Stepp newsclips

<http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/epa-appoints-region-head-to-cover-home-of-lead-contamination-crisis/article/2643923>

EPA appoints region head to cover home of lead-contamination crisis

by [John Siciliano](#) | Dec 19, 2017, 12:25 PM [Share on Twitter](#) [Share on Facebook](#) [Email this article](#) [Share on LinkedIn](#) [Print this article](#)
 <image001.jpg>Cathy Stepp will oversee EPA efforts in Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin. (@EPAregion7/Twitter
[Cory Booker gets additional police protection after death threat](#)

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt appointed Cathy Stepp to become regional administrator for Region 5, which includes the home of the lead contamination crisis in Flint, Mich., the agency announced Tuesday.

Stepp will oversee EPA efforts in Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

The Region 5 office has become of critical political importance in recent years after the Flint drinking water crisis captured national attention during last year's presidential election.

The drinking water crisis in the working-class city north of Detroit also became a focal point in congressional oversight last year and in major spending bill fights. The crisis started after Republican Gov. Rick Snyder appointed a project manager to find more cost-effective ways of supplying water to Flint.

The appointee signed off on a plan to divert the city's water supply from Lake Michigan to the Flint River, which caused the drinking water pipes in the city to corrode, sending large amounts of lead into residents' drinking water.

Stepp is coming from the EPA Region 7 office, where she serves as principal deputy regional administrator. Region 7 serves Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska and nine tribal nations.

She previously served in the Midwest region as the secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources from 2011 to 2017. She also served as a state senator in Wisconsin.

Pruitt said her experience brings "a fresh perspective to EPA as we look to implement President Trump's agenda."

Susan Hedman, the Region 5 head who served under the Obama administration's EPA, resigned over the Flint water crisis after it was reported that she refused to provide information on the lead contamination crisis after being contacted by the mayor.

<https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/illinois/articles/2017-12-19/former-wisconsin-regulator-to-lead-epas-chicago-office>

https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/energy-environment/former-wisconsin-regulator-to-lead-epas-chicago-office/2017/12/19/b2269e14-e50f-11e7-927a-e72eac1e73b6_story.html?utm_term=.4cc856bc6cfd

Former Wisconsin Regulator to Lead EPA's Chicago Office

A former Wisconsin state regulator has been named chief of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's regional office in Chicago.

Dec. 19, 2017, at 8:15 p.m.

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<image002.jpg>

By JOHN FLESHER and TAMMY WEBBER, Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Former Wisconsin regulator Cathy Stepp was named Tuesday as head of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's regional office in Chicago, drawing praise from business groups and criticism from environmental activists fearful she will weaken enforcement of rules protecting the Great Lakes and air quality in the Upper Midwest's industrial centers.

The assignment came four months after Stepp was named a deputy administrator for another EPA regional office near Kansas City. Previously, she served six years as director of the Wisconsin Department

of Natural Resources and was a Republican state senator from 2003-07. As head of EPA's Region 5, she will oversee operations in Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin.

"Cathy Stepp's experience working as a statewide cabinet official, elected official and small business owner will bring a fresh perspective to EPA as we look to implement President Trump's agenda," EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt said.

Henry Henderson, the Natural Resources Defense Council's Midwest director, said Stepp's record "fits nicely with the lax mode of enforcement favored by the Trump administration," adding that environmental groups will be "very, very busy" under her tenure.

A former homebuilder with no scientific background, Stepp was chosen by Gov. Scott Walker to lead the Wisconsin natural resources department, where she oversaw a reorganization that included staffing cuts in its science and research bureau.

The number of enforcement cases fell sharply during her tenure. The department replaced some passages on its website describing humans as partly responsible for climate change, saying instead that scientists were still debating the matter.

When she accepted the earlier EPA posting in August, Stepp told staffers with the Wisconsin department she was leaving behind an agency that ensured businesses were not "delayed by bureaucracy."

The head of the EPA's national employee union said Stepp, 54, is unqualified and has a history of favoring business interests over environmental protection.

"I see her cutting back on enforcement and fines and doing things that certain aspects of industry will appreciate," said John O'Grady, president of AFGE Council 238, which represents about 9,000 EPA staffers.

Howard Learner, executive director the Chicago-based Environmental Law & Policy Center, said the Wisconsin natural resources department under Stepp "turned back the clock on basic safeguards" of water and air.

"Heading up Region 5 means protecting the Great Lakes, the world's largest freshwater resource that supplies safe, clean drinking water to tens of millions of people," Learner said. "We hope Ms. Stepp will bring a different perspective ... than her track record in Wisconsin would suggest."

The region includes most of the Great Lakes and manufacturing cities such as Chicago, Detroit and Cleveland, plus rural areas challenged by rapid accumulation of industry-scale farms. The EPA Chicago office criticized Michigan for failing to prevent lead pollution of drinking water in Flint, but some members of Congress said the federal agency also should have done more.

With her Wisconsin roots, Stepp is well-acquainted with the lakes' pollution problems such as algae blooms, invasive species and harbors coated with toxic chemicals, said Cameron Davis, a former EPA senior adviser who oversaw an ambitious restoration initiative during the Obama administration.

"Her key challenges — and where the public will be watching — are to ensure compliance," Davis said. "Because of the Midwest's history, EPA can't just clean up past problems. It has to work with states to make sure the region's sustainable businesses aren't disadvantaged."

Walker said Stepp was "a strong, trusted reformer," while Kurt Bauer, president of Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce, said she had "routinely balanced the needs of a growing economy with the importance of protecting our natural resources."

Flesher reported from Traverse City, Michigan.

<https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/2017/12/19/former-wisconsin-dnr-secretary-cathy-stepp-take-charge-epas-midwest-regional-office/964407001/>

Former Wisconsin DNR Secretary Cathy Stepp to take charge of EPA's Midwest regional office

Lee Bergquist, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Published 10:03 a.m. CT Dec. 19, 2017 | Updated 12:47 p.m. CT Dec. 19, 2017
<image003.jpg>Buy Photo

Gov. Scott Walker and then-DNR Secretary Cathy Stepp in May 2013.(Photo: Mike De Sisti/Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)Buy Photo

Cathy Stepp, a former Republican state senator who served as secretary of the Department of Natural Resources for more than six years, was named on Tuesday by the Trump administration to run the regional office of the Environmental Protection Agency in Chicago.

The Region 5 office oversees environmental protection in Wisconsin, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota and Ohio for the federal government.

The appointment comes as plans begin for the construction of a \$10 billion flat-screen plant in Mount Pleasant in Racine County by Foxconn Technology Group, a Taiwanese company.

The company has already won exemptions from environmental rules from Gov. Scott Walker's administration. The massive project will require some federal reviews, as well.

RELATED: Cathy Stepp leaving Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources post for Trump administration

In August, Stepp left the DNR to take a post at the EPA in the regional office in Kansas City.

In a statement Tuesday, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt said: "Cathy Stepp's experience working as a statewide cabinet official, elected official, and small business owner will bring a fresh perspective to EPA as we look to implement President Trump's agenda."

RELATED: EPA chief sweeps office for bugs, installs high-tech locks

Stepp's tenure at the DNR in Wisconsin was applauded by the state's business community as she sought to ease regulatory constraints on the private sector.

But she was criticized by conservationists who said the agency became more reluctant to enforce environmental protections.

A former homebuilder from Sturtevant, Stepp had been a critic of the DNR before she joined the agency. After her appointment by Walker, Stepp tried to make the agency more responsive to businesses and hold down costs for taxpayers.

Stepp often asserted that her pro-business approach didn't translate into the agency shirking its responsibility to protect the environment.

Related: Wisconsin, under Scott Walker, no longer leads in conservation

Still, she presided over a decrease in enforcement actions, cuts to the DNR's science and research bureau, and increases in fees for state parks and campsites.

Her tenure also included what some saw as a less aggressive approach to fighting chronic wasting disease in the white-tailed deer population and a slowdown in new land purchases for hikers and hunters through the state's stewardship program.

As she worked to shift the direction of the agency, she still faced criticisms from northern Wisconsin conservatives who pushed for more regulatory flexibility and fewer constraints on logging and mining.

States enforce federal air and water regulations, but the EPA has oversight over those programs.

In the case of Foxconn, the company will be applying for permits from the DNR for air emissions, including hazardous air pollutants, as well as wastewater and stormwater.

The EPA regulates 187 toxic air pollutants not regulated by Wisconsin. It is expected that Foxconn will use chemicals regulated under federal law to manufacture ultra-high-definition LCD panels.

The permits to regulate these pollutants can be challenged and environmental groups could petition the EPA to investigate whether state officials are complying with the law.

Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce President & CEO Kurt Bauer said in a statement:

“As secretary of the Wisconsin DNR, (Stepp) routinely balanced the needs of a growing economy with the importance of protecting our natural resources. As Region 5 administrator, I have no doubt that she will take a common-sense approach to environmental oversight, just as she did for nearly seven years in Wisconsin.”

Wisconsin Realtors Association Senior Vice President of Legal and Public Affairs Thomas D. Larson said:

“No problem is too big for Cathy Stepp. Her enthusiastic, can-do attitude, combined with her tireless energy and superb problem-solving skills make her the perfect choice to serve as the Regional Administrator for EPA’s Region 5.”

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/breaking/ct-trump-midwest-epa-director-20171219-story.html>

Trump EPA pick for Midwest cut enforcement, scrapped climate change information in Wisconsin

<image004.jpg>
M.P. King / AP

Cathy Stepp, secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, speaks in her office on Jan. 13, 2017, in Madison, Wis. Stepp on Dec. 19 was put in charge of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency region that oversees Illinois and four other states. (M.P. King / AP)
Michael Hawthorne **Contact Reporter** Chicago Tribune

The Trump administration's pick to lead the Environmental Protection Agency's Midwest office is a former Wisconsin state official who rolled back enforcement of anti-pollution laws, reduced funding for scientific research and scrubbed references to human-caused climate change from government websites.

Cathy Stepp, who since August has been a deputy regional administrator in the EPA's Kansas City, Kan., office, will take over the top spot at the agency's Chicago outpost less than two years after the Obama administration ousted a predecessor over the agency's lax response to the Flint, Mich., water crisis.

The Midwest office traditionally has been one of the agency's biggest and busiest, prosecuting companies that pollute the air, water and land in Illinois and five other states around the Great Lakes. The Trump administration has been pushing for deep cuts in the EPA's budget and proposing massive layoffs of agency employees.

An EPA statement announcing Stepp's appointment Tuesday included references to her background as a homebuilder, Republican state lawmaker and director of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources under Republican Gov. Scott Walker.

"Cathy Stepp's experience working as a statewide cabinet official, elected official, and small business owner will bring a fresh perspective to EPA as we look to implement President Trump's agenda," EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt said in the statement.

"I have no doubt that she will take a common-sense approach to environmental oversight, just as she did for nearly seven years in Wisconsin," Kurt Bauer, president of the Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce trade group, said in the release.

Environmental groups were less enthused, accusing Stepp of routinely siding with polluters instead of protecting public health and the environment during her tenure in Wisconsin state government.

Fines for environmental violations fell sharply during Stepp's tenure at the Wisconsin DNR. She cut funding for a science office that had studied potential environmental damages from iron mining in northern Wisconsin and researched the effects of climate change in the state.

Stepp also prompted an outcry when she ordered information purged from the agency's website about heat-trapping pollution from "human activities."

"Her track record is rolling back safeguards," said Howard Learner, president of the nonprofit, Chicago-based Environmental Law and Policy Center. "It's out of touch with what the public believes are core environment and public health values."

"Groups like ours are going to be very, very busy because it's unlikely the feds will come riding in to deal with messes on Chicago's Southeast Side or in northwest Indiana," said Henry Henderson, Midwest director of the nonprofit Natural Resources Defense Council and former commissioner of the now-defunct Chicago Department of Environment.

Stepp will join the EPA's Chicago office as several enforcement actions initiated during the last days of the Obama administration remain unresolved.

The Tribune first reported in July that EPA inspectors had documented hundreds of air pollution violations at the Indiana Harbor Coke Co. on the southwest shore of Lake Michigan, where coal is baked into high-carbon coke for the steel industry. Work on a legal settlement negotiated by the EPA and the Department of Justice has stalled since Pruitt and Attorney General Jeff Sessions took office.

Other cases include S.H. Bell, a bulk storage company cited for high levels of brain-damaging manganese at facilities on the Southeast Side of Chicago and outside East Liverpool, Ohio; and Behr Iron and Metal, a Rockford scrap metal processor cited twice last year for violating federal limits on lead, another metal that can permanently damage the developing brains of children.

All three companies were cited after receiving requests for air pollution testing from Chicago-based EPA officials. Testing requests in the Midwest have declined sharply this year, dropping to 12 since Donald Trump took office from 23 during the last year of the Obama administration and 76 the year before, according to EPA records.

Robert Kaplan, who has been acting regional administrator since Susan Hedman was forced out during the Flint crisis, told colleagues in an email that Stepp "will hit the ground running as we implement the administrator's priorities."

But the president of the EPA employees union, who has been sharply critical of Pruitt, said choosing Stepp to run the Midwest office is akin to "asking the fox to guard the henhouse."

"About the only thing I can assure you is after Cathy steps away from her new role ... the dedicated civilian workforce at the agency will still be here (I hope) to protect human health and the environment," John O'Grady, an environmental scientist who leads the American Federation of Government Employees Council 238, said in an email to the Tribune. "Hopefully, there will not be too many disasters to clean up at taxpayers' expense."

mhawthorne@chicagotribune.com

Twitter @scribeguy

http://www.mlive.com/news/index.ssf/2017/12/cathy_stepp_epa.html

New EPA Region 5 head left Wisconsin DNR 'in tatters,' say critics

Updated Dec 19, 9:03 PM; Posted Dec 19, 9:00 PM

<image005.jpg>

In this Jan. 13, 2017 file photo, Cathy Stepp, secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, speaks during an interview in her office in Madison, Wis. EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt said Tuesday, Dec. 19, 2017, that Stepp will be in charge of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Region 5, which oversees the EPA's operations in Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin. She previously led Wisconsin's Department of Natural Resources. (*M.P. King/Wisconsin State Journal via AP File*)

Comment

177 shares

By Garret Ellison

gellison@mlive.com

CHICAGO, IL -- A former Wisconsin state official known for an industry-friendly approach to environmental regulation has been named head of the regional Environmental Protection Agency office that oversees agency operations in Michigan.

Cathy Stepp, former secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and a polarizing figure in the Midwest natural resources and environmental protection world, was named EPA Region 5 administrator on Tuesday, Dec. 19.

Stepp was a Republican state senator before a six-year tenure at the Wisconsin DNR marked by a sharp drop in pollution enforcement and funding cuts for climate change and mining damage research.

Stepp replaces acting Region 5 administrator Robert Kaplan, who took over the Chicago office after former chief Susan Hedman resigned in early 2016 amid criticism that EPA waited too long before stepping into the Flint drinking water crisis.

"Cathy Stepp's experience working as a statewide cabinet official, elected official, and small business owner will bring a fresh perspective to EPA as we look to implement President Trump's agenda," said EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt.

Her appointment came with praise from Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, Ohio EPA director Craig Butler, the Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce and Wisconsin Realtors associations, and Minnesota Pollution Control Agency commissioner John Linc Stine.

Walker called Stepp a "strong, trusted reformer" who led an agency "committed to preserving and promoting our natural resources while placing a strong focus on customer service and common sense."

Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce CEO Kurt Bauer said Stepp "routinely balanced the needs of a growing economy with the importance of protecting our natural resources."

"As Region 5 Administrator, I have no doubt that she will take a common-sense approach to environmental oversight, just as she did for nearly seven years in Wisconsin," Bauer said.

Environmental groups were less happy. The Natural Resources Defense Council, the Environmental Law & Policy Center and other groups expressed dismay and concern about Stepp's track record as an environmental regulator.

Stepp left the DNR "in tatters," said Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters director Kerry Schumann.

"Under her watch, the agency's environmental enforcement abilities were dismantled, its scientists kicked out, its website scrubbed of climate change information and, under the orders of the Walker Administration, she shifted its focus from protecting Wisconsin's natural resources to handing out favors to polluters," she said.

Putting Stepp in charge of the DNR was akin to "putting Lindsay Lohan in charge of a rehab center," a Democrat state senator told the Wisconsin State Journal in 2010.

A former homebuilder with no scientific background, Stepp oversaw a DNR reorganization that included staffing cuts in its science and research bureau, according to the Associated Press.

The number of DNR pollution enforcement cases fell sharply on her watch and the DNR scrubbed language from its website that said humans are partly responsible for climate change.

According to the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel, Stepp gave a 2015 speech in which she said her goal at the DNR was to shift the agency from a "prohibiting agency to a permitting agency, which is frankly what I thought we were supposed to be."

According to the Journal-Sentinel, that shift is borne out by major exemptions from state environmental protection laws for Foxconn, which is building a \$10 billion liquid crystal display panel plant three times larger than the Pentagon in Racine County, which Stepp represented part of as state senator.

As head of EPA Region 5, Stepp will oversee agency actions in the Midwest states of Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin. The Chicago office also administers the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, a toxic cleanup, green infrastructure and invasive

species management program the Trump administration sought to eliminate in its 2018 budget as part of a wider attempt to slash the EPA's overall budget by a third.

Stepp has been working as deputy administrator at EPA's Region 7 office in Kansas City since August.

<http://chicagotonight.wttw.com/2017/12/19/epa-union-blasts-pruitt-s-pick-lead-regional-office-chicago>

EPA Union Blasts Pruitt's Pick to Lead Regional Office in Chicago

Alex Ruppenthal | December 19, 2017 3:30 pm

<image006.jpg>Cathy Stepp, left, former secretary of Wisconsin's Department of Natural Resources, will take over in 2018 as head of the EPA's regional office in Chicago. (Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources)

Cathy Stepp, a businesswoman-turned-politician who as head of Wisconsin's Department of Natural Resources sought to ease enforcement of environmental regulations, was named Tuesday by the Trump administration to lead the Environmental Protection Agency's regional office in Chicago.

Starting in January, Stepp will take charge of the EPA's Region 5 office, which oversees the agency's work in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin. She replaces Robert Kaplan, a career EPA employee who will return to his permanent position as deputy regional administrator.

"Cathy Stepp's experience working as a statewide cabinet official, elected official and small business owner will bring a fresh perspective to EPA as we look to implement President Trump's agenda," EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt said in a statement.

As head of Wisconsin's DNR for six years starting in 2011, Stepp was praised by the state's business community for her efforts to ease regulations, and for her overall pro-business approach.

She was at the same time criticized by environmental advocates for decreasing enforcement, shrinking the agency's science and research bureau and increasing fees to access state parks. Last year, nonpartisan auditors found that her agency failed to follow its own enforcement policies

against water polluters more than 94 percent of the time between 2005 and 2015.

A former Republican state senator from Racine County, Stepp also made news for ordering the removal of information about human-caused climate change from the DNR's website.

<image008.jpg>EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt speaks April 19 after meeting with residents of East Chicago's lead-contaminated neighborhoods. (Alex Ruppenthal / Chicago Tonight)

Following Stepp's appointment on Tuesday, John O'Grady, president of the EPA's national employee union, released a statement slamming Pruitt's decision.

"Oh boy, here comes another non-scientist who doesn't acknowledge that climate change is real," said O'Grady, head of AFGE Council 238, which represents 9,000 EPA employees nationwide. "Putting Ms. Stepp in charge of the largest regional office in the EPA is akin to asking the fox to guard the hen house. If her record at Wisconsin DNR is any indication, Ms. Stepp will successfully cut funding for enforcement, along with fines for violations."

Stepp, 54, started a home-construction business in 1991 that she ran until shortly after her election to the Wisconsin state senate in 2002. She served for four years before returning to the private sector as a sales training consultant.

In 2011, Gov. Scott Walker appointed Stepp as head of the state's DNR, making her the first woman to lead the agency. Within four years, pollution fines issued by the agency fell to a 30-year low.

In August, Stepp left Wisconsin's DNR to become deputy regional administrator for EPA's Region 7 office near Kansas City.

"Cathy is a strong, trusted reformer who will continue to serve the country well as an EPA regional administrator," Walker said in a statement. "As Wisconsin's DNR secretary, she led an outstanding workforce committed to preserving and promoting our natural resources while placing a strong focus on customer service and common sense."

Business leaders from Wisconsin applauded Stepp's appointment to lead EPA's Midwestern office, with Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce President Kurt Bauer saying that as head of the state's DNR, Stepp "routinely balanced the needs of a growing economy with the importance of protecting our natural resources," according to a statement.

Despite reassurances from Pruitt, Region 5 staff have remained concerned about rumors that the Trump administration could close the

Chicago office and consolidate the region's staff with another regional office.

Environmental advocates said they feared Stepp would help continue Pruitt's agenda of cutting the EPA's workforce and scaling back oversight of industry.

Jack Darin, director of the Sierra Club in Illinois, referred to Stepp as an "industry puppet" on Twitter.

"Happy holidays polluters; lumps of coal for the rest of us," he wrote.

O'Grady, the EPA union president, said Stepp's track record includes prioritizing the interests of polluters over residents and impeding efforts to preserve clean air and water.

"About the only thing I can assure you is that after Cathy steps away from her new role as regional administrator for EPA Region 5, the dedicated civilian workforce at the agency will still be here (I hope) to protect human health and the environment," O'Grady said. "Hopefully, there will not be too many disasters to clean up at taxpayers' expense."